

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 HANOI 002870

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV

PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [VM](#) [RELFREE](#) [HUMANR](#) [BTA](#) [WTRO](#) [APEC](#) [CTERR](#)

SUBJECT: EAP DAS Huhtala's October 21 Meeting with Senior Vice Foreign Minister Le Cong Phung

1. (SBU) Summary: During an October 21 meeting with Senior Vice Foreign Minister Le Cong Phung, EAP Deputy Assistant Secretary Marie Huhtala underlined the need for Vietnam to

SIPDIS

take concrete steps to improve its religious freedom situation, particularly in the run-up to next year's events to commemorate the tenth anniversary of bilateral relations, including the hoped-for visit to the United States of Prime Minister Phan Van Khai. VFM Phung replied in familiar terms that Vietnam had already taken many positive and "appropriate" steps in this area and will take more as necessary. DAS Huhtala stressed the USG's support both for the continued implementation of the Bilateral Trade Agreement and Vietnam's WTO accession. In spite of progress in trade and other areas, however, law enforcement cooperation remained lacking, DAS Huhtala said. For its part, MFA sought greater law enforcement cooperation with other countries and hoped that the United States itself would provide greater cooperation in dealing with anti-Vietnam "terrorists" still in the United States. DAS Huhtala informed VFM Phung that the Department had passed on to the White House the GVN's request for a Presidential meeting in Santiago in November. End Summary.

2. (SBU) Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs Marie Huhtala met October 21 with Senior Vice Foreign Minister Le Cong Phung. The Ambassador and Pol/C also attended. VFM Phung opened by congratulating DAS Huhtala on the assumption of her new position and underlined that both countries would be busy in the coming months as they prepared to mark the tenth anniversary of the normalization of bilateral relations in 2005. DAS Huhtala observed that much in Vietnam has changed since her last visit, and, since normalization, the United States and Vietnam have made a great deal of progress through signing and implementing the Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA), cooperating in the efforts for fullest possible accounting of POW/MIAs and expanding humanitarian and development assistance.

3. (SBU) With trade ties continuing to grow and political relations increasingly substantive, VFM Phung expressed his satisfaction with the current state of relations. Both countries now have to focus on building a "framework" to sustain the continued development of ties to serve both countries' peoples and governments. However, there is also business to attend to in the bilateral relationship, VFM Phung continued. With next year's anniversary approaching -- and a possible visit by PM Phan Van Khai in the offing -- both sides have to make efforts to create a "good atmosphere." Recalling his September conversation with the Deputy Secretary, VFM Phung said that Mr. Armitage had expressed his support for a PM Khai visit in the first quarter of 2005. For its part, Vietnam's leadership will have to make a decision on the visit and its timing.

Religious Freedom

4. (SBU) The Deputy Secretary's support for a successful visit by the Prime Minister reflects the position of the USG, DAS Huhtala said. Having a successful visit, however, requires our addressing issues in the areas of human rights and religious freedom. VFM Phung rejoined that, even if these issues were resolved, other issues would rise up in their place. There is no such thing as a 100 percent perfect relationship, he continued, but what is important is bilateral cooperation and how the United States and Vietnam approach the problems facing them. For example, on the issue of Country of Particular Concern (CPC) designation, we have to realize that there are differences between our two countries in how we approach this issue. Vietnam understands that there is an American domestic angle to this issue, just as Vietnam itself has a domestic angle. If the United States and Vietnam desire good relations and seek to create a "good atmosphere," both sides have to make sincere efforts, VFM Phung stressed.

15. (SBU) Even though there has been some progress in the area of religious freedom, resolving this issue requires further efforts and close bilateral cooperation, DAS Huhtala said. Vietnam could make a positive impact by taking certain concrete steps. The International Religious Freedom Act has the requirement for potential economic sanctions if, after 90 or 180 days, we have not seen progress on the part of Vietnam. Although we still have time, Vietnam must nonetheless act. We understand that the GVN is preparing the implementing regulations for the new Ordinance on Religion. Strong language in those regulations banning forced renunciations would make a significant impression, DAS Huhtala said.

16. (SBU) Vietnam has never had a policy that forbids people from following their religious beliefs, VFM Phung responded. Furthermore, Vietnam's Constitution protects the people's right to practice or not practice religion freely. It should be clear that there have been a number of improvements recently in the religious freedom situation in Vietnam. DAS Huhtala replied that, while it is important to have a strong legal framework in support of religious freedom, it is equally important for local officials to know the government's laws and policy so as to not violate religious rights. If there were any such violations, the local officials would surely be investigated and, if necessary, punished, VFM Phung retorted.

17. (SBU) Recalling his conversation with International Religious Freedom Ambassador John Hanford, Phung relayed that the Ambassador had said he was not yet satisfied with Vietnam's efforts. But Vietnam cannot satisfy everyone. It had been very difficult for Vietnam to take the step to promulgate the new Ordinance on Religion. Nonetheless, if further changes are required, Vietnam will make the necessary changes in the future. The United States has to see the "nature" of the actions Vietnam has taken and cannot expect complete satisfaction all of the time. The GVN respects freedom of religion and understands that it has to take steps and will continue to take steps. However, in devising its policy, the GVN also has to rely on Vietnam's "actual circumstances, the people's psychology and society's conditions." It is not easy, but "things are getting better and better," Phung stressed.

Trade: BTA and WTO

18. (SBU) DAS Huhtala noted that BTA implementation is going well. VFM Phung responded that Vietnam expects that the USG will support Vietnam's WTO accession and, through continued good cooperation, will implement further the BTA. Vietnam had already concluded its bilateral WTO talks with the EU and hopes to do the same with the United States "soon." The USG has a strong will to make the BTA work and, as the Deputy Secretary said, we support Vietnam strongly in its WTO aspirations, DAS Huhtala noted. Although there will always be issues requiring our attention -- such as intellectual property rights, a problem that is shared by all in the region -- we will continue to work out our differences.

Law Enforcement Cooperation

19. (SBU) DAS Huhtala noted that, while there has been progress in many areas, bilateral law enforcement cooperation is not going well. This is one area that is not where it should be, and United States and Vietnam need to work together more closely. Law enforcement cooperation is especially important in light of the Global War on Terror, and one way to improve our relationship in this area is through the better sharing of information. VFM Phung replied that MFA hopes to see greater cooperation in the security area. Vietnam's position on terror is clear, and Vietnam is making progress in its cooperative counterterrorism efforts with others in the region, Phung said.

110. (SBU) For Vietnam's part, it also seeks greater cooperation from the United States in the area of law enforcement cooperation, Phung continued. For example, there are anti-Vietnam "terrorists" in the United States such as Nguyen Huu Chanh and Vo Van Duc, the latter of whom "should be extradited." There was the also the recent case of shots fired on two occasions into a Vietnamese Consulate General employee's residence in San Francisco, Phung added. DAS Huhtala replied that the Department had asked the FBI to look into Chanh and that the USG is working on the Vo Van Duc case. In the case of the shots fired in San Francisco, the Department requested the San Francisco Police Department's assistance, and there are indications that the shots were a result of random violence. These incidents showed the necessity of bilateral law enforcement cooperation and the importance of sharing information, DAS Huhtala said.

11. (SBU) MFA encouraged Vietnam's security forces to work with the police and law enforcement agencies of other countries, VFM Phung noted. During the ASEM-5 Summit, Vietnam had excellent cooperation with "others," and, fortunately, there were no security incidents during the meeting. Vietnam will continue to cooperate with other countries in the region to both share information and do whatever is possible to combat terrorism, Phung stressed.

APEC 2004

12. (SBU) In closing, DAS Huhtala told VFM Phung that the Department had conveyed to the White House Vietnam's request for a meeting between the President and Vietnam State President Tran Duc Luong in Santiago.

MARINE